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ABSTRACT

Teachers need to be aware of the stereotypes that their textbooks promote. An informal survey of the illustrations in a sampling of third grade textbooks revealed numerous examples of ethnic and sexist stereotypes. A knowledge of children's learning patterns can help teachers lead their students away from stereotypes by introducing them to information beyond their textbooks. Suggested classroom activities include (1) comparing a newspaper report on a geographic location to a textbook account of that place, (2) comparing news reports to textbook descriptions of certain groups of people, (3) using male and female paper dolls in a classroom of very young children, (4) taking a field trip to see persons working in nontraditional roles, (5) expanding the textbook material on a particular ethnic group, and (6) posting a career bulletin board with pictures of both males and females in certain careers. (AEA)

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DON'T SHUT A STEREOTYPE SKELETON IN YOUR CLASSROOM CLOSET

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Let me start this session with a problem. A father and his son were in a terrible car accident. When help arrived, there was no hope for the father. The son, however, was rushed to a hospital in his hometown. Attendants in the emergency room saw the need for an immediate operation and summoned a doctor. The patient was rushed to the operating room and prepared for surgery. The surgeon entered the operating room, took one look at the boy and exclained in horror, "I can't operate on that boy, he's my son!"

Can the boy really be the doctor's son? How do you explain the story? Of course, the surgeon is the boy's mother.

Why do we as educators and humans continue to fall into stereotype traps? Let's do some work together and see if we can discover why.

Write the word "Eskimo" in the first workshop sheet you received as you came into the room. Now very quickly list some words or phrases to describe an Eskimo. In other words, list words or phrases you might use to answer a young child's question, "What's an Eskimo?"

We'll come back to "Eskimo" later. Now write the word "Athlete." Use your second workshop sheet if you need it. List words or phrases to describe an athlete.

Let's go to a third heading. Write the word "Farmer" as your next heading, and again, list words or phrases to describe a farmer.

And one more category. List "Bum" as your fourth heading. Quickly list words or phrases to describe a bum.

Okay, let's go back now to the Eskimo. On the overhead projector I'm going to show you four pictures of Eskimos. Write the letter of the picture (A, B, C or D) which most closely matches the words or phrases you listed to describe an Eskimo. Note that A and B are females.

We'll come back to Eskimos later for a score. Let's look now at some pictures of athletes. Again, write on your paper the letter of the picture that most closely matches your descriptive words or phrases about athletes. Note that A and B are males.

Let's move on to farmers. Is A, B, C or D closest to your description? Write the letter down on your paper. Note that A and B are females.

And let's look at our last category -- bums. Is A, B, C or D most like your words. Write the letter on your paper. Note that B and C are males.

Okay, I promised to give you a score. You get from 1 to 4 points for each category. Go back to Eskimo: C = 4, A = 3, B = 2, D = 1. For athlete: A = 4, D = 3, B = 2, C = 1. For farmer: D = 4, A = 3, C = 2, B = 1. For bum: B = 4, D = 3, A = 2, C = 1. Now total your four scores.

How many of you scored between 13 and 16 points? Congratulations, you are stereotype experts. How many of you had scores of four or below? Good, you're the learners, the growers, the ones who may have few stereotype skeletons in your classroom closet.

Let's look again at each group of pictures and see how each fulfills the label of Eskimo, athlete, farmer, or bum.

By the way, how many of you thought about a female as you described an Eskimo? an athlete? a farmer? a bum? See, we're right back to that old stereotyped-doctor syndrome.

Let me pose again the question I started with.

Why do we fall into stereotype traps? Why do the youngsters we teach fall into stereotype traps? Could it be that there are indeed stereotype skeletons in our classroom closets? Let's look into some typical classroom closets to begin to answer these questions.

I decided to do a random sample of materials that might be in a typical classroom closet. I chose the middle grade of an elementary school - grade three. I focused on pictures rather than words because I feel that pictures can be read by all youngsters. We're also told that pictures are worth thousands of words. I only went to one classroom closet but I chose the materials strictly by chance, and I found many examples of stereotypitis. At least, what I found often seemed to be predictable, oversimplified traits or behaviors attributed as common to entire groups with little regard for personal or individual characteristics. That for me is stereotyping, and I'll let you decide, as you listen to my descriptions, whether or not you feel the materials did show symptoms of stereotypitis. You might keep a score for each text, listing S for what you consider a possible stereotype and G for each item that you feel might help a child grow in concept development.

I started with the pictures in a social studies text for grade three. Here are the pictures I found: squatting Africans watching a white scientist examine an artifact, Brazilians in a shanty slum, Brazilians at a yacht club, a Bedouin on a camel, Eskimos in skins emerging from an igloo, Austrialian aborigines making a horn and a hat, African pygmies blowing flutes in a dance, a village council in modern India meeting in

front of a hut, a farmer using an ox-pulled plow in India, an Indian family riding in an ox-pulled cart, Indians in front of a temple, another Indian council meeting in (and I dare to stereotype) an "American type" house, ox pulling a water wheel in India, a Japanese farmer using an ox-pulled plow in a rice paddy, Indians outside a mosque, Chinese farming on their knees in a rice paddy, Japanese in a TV factory, Indian women selling in the streets, an auto factory in India, a South African shanty tow, an Indian radio factory, a Nigerian disc jockey, an Indian power station, and an Indian boarding a jet. To my mind, stereotype after stereotype. What pictures might have helped youngsters broaden their views of people?

Now you might argue that a social studies text is designed to show particular cultural patterns, that it tries to make certain points or contrasts. Granted. But only those stereotypical traits? Only ox-pulled carts, only farmers, only rice paddies? This may be the only time in an elementary school when youngsters see Indians, Japanese, Eskimos, Chinese. Thus they come away from the experience with a very limited--a distroted view. Children need richer experiences.

Let me turn to a 1978 math book published in what is surely an enlightened era. The text is an artful dodger. It shows very few humans in its more than 300 pages, but when it does -- the dreaded disease, stereotypitis, rears its ugly head.

In circus scenes women ride animals while males perform on stilts and trapeze. When three adults are shown at a stove, the male, busy in the foreground, is the chef while a female and male look over his shoulder in wonder. "Aha," you say. "A break from the stereotype of the female cook!" No so. She's there in a minor, passive role. In a winter scene all the figures are polarized (blurred), but all appear to be males skiing, sleeding and skating. So the math book in our classroom closet is guilty.

One would expect that a 1977 health book full of excellent, full-color photos could easily show a balance of youngsters to avoid sexism or ethnic bias. The book is the pits of male/female stereotyping. It's a full-blown epidemic of stereotypitis. Let me cite just a few examples.

We see boys fishing, reading and eating on pages where girls stand, look lonely or look in a mirror. In a section on feelings, guess which sex is crying, laughing, looking sad, looking defiant. Girl, boy, birl, boy is the pattern. Can you predict what you'd find in a chapter on sickness? There's a mother giving medicine to a girl, a nurse giving a pill to a girl, but a smiling, healthy boy getting a checkup from a smiling, healthy male doctor. Are boys never sick? Of course not, and there's a chapter on exercise to prove it: four photos showing males at soccer, football, basketball and baseball. Can you believe it? Ah, but that's not all.

There's a section on health workers and safety workers. In it, females are law enforcer, therapist, dental aids, x-ray technician, crossing guard and our good old nurse. You can predict the male side. There's dentist, doctor, pharmacist, lab worker, garbage collector, veterinarian, law enforcer, ambulance driver, fire fighter and, to balance that woman crossing guard, a safety patrol boy. It's hard to believe that a modern-day publisher would produce such a book. It's even harder to believe that a school would permit such a stereotype skeleton in a classroom closet.

What about science? well, the third grade book I pulled from the shelf was dated 1970, but the publisher used art instead of photographs. So the text can't use unavailability of photos as an excuse for the sexism I found.

Some samples: a boy pointing out the environment to two girls (Imagine, a third-grade harem!); boys at raking, basketball and jumping while girls play hopscotch; both sexes on swings but a boy is highest; a girl looks through a

screened window at insects while six pages along a boy collects insects with a net; boys are experimenting seven times in the book while a girl experiments only once--she holds a paper for a boy. Incredible! So much for science.

I told you my selection was random so when I pulled out a language arts text, I came up with a 1977 book published in Canada. Is there stereotypitis across the boarder? I'm afraid there is. This book mixed photos and art, the art primarily in a comic strip format. There was a stupid, though male bully. Males were skiing, skating, hang gliding or associated with cars. When females skied in a cartoon all three were depicted with broken legs. Four times males were shown in what I call the "Dumb-father TV Role." When an Eskimo boy appeared, he was shown in skins and boots suitable for framing. And there was another great ethnic piece of art. In fact, its point seemed to be to make a stereotype association. Four people were shown in front of their homes: a female movie star before her mansion, a Swiss dressed lass by an A-frame, a monk at his hacienda and a cowboy at his log cabin. What are these materials going to do to our students?

Let me end this dismal picture with just summary notions about other materials I checked in that classroom closet. A 1965 reading series showed mother doing all those lovely household chores, a girl showed a boy how to treat horses, a sailor popped out as Latin in a big mustache and red-and-white-striped shirt, an older brother was hero to his little sister, and later there was an encore to this theme, but our very knowing publisher used Black children in the art.

A 1971 filmstrip series on the environment showed equally poor judgement. Although the photos were set in city environs, all the people shown investigating pollution were white and middle class.

You may be thinking that I left out parts of books or that I exaggerated the situation. Unfortunately, that's not the case. And if you start looking, I fear you're going to find much the same. You may find yourself saying, "I can't believe it! I'm surrounded by stereotypitis! What can I do?"

Well, let's join hands for children at this very moment. Together let's look at the learning patterns children bring to us, and let's look at what we might do to utilize those patterns as starting points for moving children beyond stereotypes to ever-expanding notions of every facet of life that touches them.

Where shall we start? Let's look first at a basic in the learning process. That basic is relationships. Isolated bits of sensation mean nothing until we begin to relate them. The more we relate sights, sounds, smells the more we know about something. As we become aware of relationships among sensations, we classify them. Our classifications become handy devices in making more extensive relationships among the ever-increasing, more complex sensations as we mature in the learning process--Unless. . . unless we become Archie Bunkers.

Archie Bunkers close the door on their classifications. Archie Bunkers don't relate new sensations to endeared classifications. Instead, Archie Bunkers fall back on limited data. They use prized generalizations to prejudge and reject new data. Archie Bunkers stereotype either willingly or unwillingly.

For an example of this learning process, let's see how an Archie Bunker might learn to stereotype runners.

In the early stages of learning, our infant Archie sees things moving. People, animals, objects move about Archie at various speeds. He hears someone label the quicker movement as "running." After Archie learns to crawl and walk, he runs. In his early school experiences he sees "Dick run!" He sees "Jane run" (Notice that he saw Dick run first, and if there is a picture, it's a good bet that Dick runs ahead of Jane.) Perhaps as Archie continues to add data to his concept bank on runner, he hears about so and so being on a track team. That turns out to be a runner named Joe. Archie sees a picture of Joe the runner. He's wearning shorts and a T shirt. Later, Archie hears about Tom, Dick and Harry. They are runners. Every time Archie sees their pictures, they are wearning shorts and a T shirt. Archie hears about Roger Bannister and looks him up. The book says he's a great runner--the first to run a male in less than four minutes. There's his picture. Guess what? Richt, he's wearing shorts and T shirt. Archie closes the concept bank on runners thinking to himself that they must be a bit nutty. And every time he hears about a runner, Archie thinks or says, "Oh, one of those." Archie has stereotyped runners.

Then one day as Archie's driving along (an adult now), a runner suddenly appears in front of him and forces him to slam on his brakes. Outraged, Archie screams, "Get out of the road, you naked nut!" Archie's intermediate-grade/school-age youngster in the car witnesses the scene and suddenly grasps with new clarity what runners are.

You greet Archie's youngster next day in your classroom. It's time for your conscious intervention. You must get this budding Archie to reopen his concept bank on runners. You have to present new sensation data to the young learner. You have to teach this learner to relate the new data to the old. You must encourage the learner to search for new relationships instead of settling for the old. How will you do it?

Can you turn to textbooks, to your classroom closet? With a little ingenuity, you might utilize both--the textbooks and the closet.

The textbook might supply the familiar ground--the experience background, the readiness for learning. The book on runners may well highlight Roger Bannister, but there may be a page on an Olympics that talks of Babe Didrikson or Wilma Rudolph. With any luck, they may be in shorts and T shirt and you're on the way. Now you leave the textbook and go to your well-stocked closet.

You turn to the "world closet" that's all around you--the living world your young Archie knows--the current world.

In recent years, indeed in recent months, newspapers, magazines, TV and radio have all reported on things runners are doing or trying to do. Wonder of wonders, current events show that <u>females</u> are runners. True, they too often wear shorts and T shirt, but they're demanding equal time in the running world. Some have the audacity to want to race against males. Both male and female runners, in current events are asking for government subsidy so they can train properly. How about that? These "naked nuts" are claiming they have rights.

A look at these current events in your classroom can force your students to examine their concepts. Perhaps as they tune into these current events, they'll discover that some of these "naked nuts" are really pretty smart. Runners offer forceful arguments. Turns out they are doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief, rich person, poor person, beggar, thief, as well as runners.

So you see my drift. If you use current events you will be forcing your students to update their concepts and breakdown their stereotypes. They'll discover that some Eskimos go to school, some work in stores, some are doctors, some demand rights, some go to jail for a cause, and so on. Current events can update one's concepts about farmers, bums and athletes too.

Let me suggest some other current events activities you can use to help youngsters keep expanding their concept banks on almost any topic.

1. Go through newspapers or other periodicals. Get students to classify people depicted in the pictures, headlines or stores. Are they male/female, black/white, white collar/blue collar? What's reported about them? Can any trend be detected? For example, are more men than women shown in politics, shown as bosses? Are white collar people reported on favorably more often than blue collar people? Why do students consider this report more favorable than that? Why are there more stories about men in politics?

2. Examine news stories or background reports of persons in the news. What are their hobbies or avocations? Can these be categorized? Do most of the men express interest in sports? What interests do the women have? Are there exceptions such as Roosevelt Greer who does needlepoint? You might provide a background for this activity by having students list their out-of-school activities and handing them in unsigned. Put a number on the lists and post them on the bulletin board. Let students decide whether each list came from a boy or a girl.

3. Compare a news report on a place with a textbook account of that place. (Cite hunger article.) How does one account support the other? Which source is better for one reason but perhaps not as valid for another reason? How are both useful in contributing to understanding?

4. Compare news reports and textbook descriptions of certain groups of people such as farmers, police officers, miners, secretaries. Make collections of newspaper pictures of these groups over a period of time. What roles does a fire-fighter assume? Which roles are important to the firefighter's chief responsibilities?

What else besides current events can help children keep adding to their concept banks? What about very young children and their concepts of male-female roles? Here are some ideas that can keep the door ever open to new possibilities.

1. Use male and female dolls or paper dolls in the classroom. Have a variety of costumes available that will fit all the models equally well. You may have to suggest putting the doctor's costume on a female doll or an apron on the male. Or you might do this yourself in working with a group. Then seek responses. Keep asking why to challenge the child who wants to close a role to one sex or the other.

2. Challenge any "all" statement such as "Doctors are men." Remind even very young children that one exception makes an "all" statement untrue.

3. When you've read a story to youngsters or they've read it themselves, discuss roles. Could the girl have done what the boy did? Do boys always act like the hero? Are men always brave? Do they cry too? Are custodians always men? Black? Old? Could women do the job? Why is the custodian's job important? the principal's?

4. Take a trip to see persons working in non-traditional roles. Or ask such a person to come to class to show youngsters what they do in their job. A male airline steward, nurse or secretary may surprise youngsters. Remember our female surgeon? Perhaps you can find a female dentist, lawyer, judge, firefighter. Just tell kids what job they're going to see or hear about. Let the worker surprise them.

As youngsters mature you'll want to continue to give them new data to expand their concept banks. Try these ideas.

1. By all means study the social studies text on a particular ethnic group. But go beyond the textbook. Suggest that the family depicted moves to your community. What would each family member be likely to do in

the new situation? What things in their old culture might they have to give up? What could they retain? How would they about this? How could we help them adjust to the new culture? Notice, there are no pat answers. The field is wide open. If applicable, read about such groups from current publications to see what is happening to them in new situations. Keep reaching. Don't close the book on the concept.

2. Ask youngsters to write or just say duologues between themselves and a person whose career or ethnic background is of interest to them. The duologue is just the words person one says to person two. As in a play, the conversations are numbered 1 and 2. Here's an example: 1. Where were you born? 2. I'm not exactly sure. Somewhere near the Arctic Circle. 1. Were you born in an igloo? 2. No, I've never been in an igloo. It was in a house in a town that's been abondoned. And so it goes. Youngsters base the duologue on what they know. When they share it, others can suggest changes that reflect their knowledge of the ethnic group or career.

3. Pass out 3 X 5 file cards. Ask children to write their favorite pastime on one side and their favorite TV show on the other. Give each child a secret number to place on both sides of the card. Post pastimes on the bulletin board one day, TV favorites another. When they're posted, each child lists the secret numbers under BOY or GIRL. After both activities are complete you reveal true identities. Students can then discuss why they chose as they did.

4. Make a doctor bulletin board, an athlete bulletin board, police officer, etc. Ask youngsters to find magazine or newspaper pictures of various people in each role. After a couple days of searching and posting, see what you have--all one sex? one race? Ask children to draw pictures to open that career to others.

I'm sure you can come up with many more ideas. The point is that we must make a conscious effort to do so. We must join hands for children. It's an attitude that must permeate our classrooms from hour to hour--an attitude that never says, "Ah, there we are, that's it, now we know!" Rather an attitude that says, "Yes, but, maybe there's more, what if...?" An attitude that continually adds new data to the storage shelves and never closes the door on a stereotype skeleton in our classroom closets.